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RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 3092
RUEHGE/AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN 0491
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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 003188

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TAGS: ECON PGOV PREL BL

SUBJECT: EVO TO INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY: OPPOSITION TO BLAME

Classified By: ADCM Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 b,d

¶1. (C) Summary: President Evo Morales and his Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) government is actively trying to project to the international community that the opposition is to blame for the violent political situation in Bolivia. The government is seeking to discredit the visit of four opposition prefects to the OAS and UN, claiming that it was orchestrated by MAS nemesis former President "Goni" Sanchez de Lozada and is further evidence that the "empire," i.e. the United States, is siding with the opposition. Meanwhile, Evo is still determined to push through the MAS constitution.
End summary.

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Evo Meets Latin American Ambassadors
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¶2. (C) Following last week's meeting with EU diplomats, President Evo Morales invited Latin American ambassadors in La Paz to meet with him December 4 to discuss the situation in Bolivia. Press reports cite the Latin American Ambassadors' concern and support for institutionality and democracy in Bolivia, while our contacts say they felt the meeting was a photo-op on Evo's part, a chance to show that the Bolivian government is reaching out to the international community. Evo recounted claims that the MAS tried to negotiate with the opposition but that the opposition was intent on blocking the MAS's program for change. According to the Mexican Ambassador, Evo said, "No matter what the cost, we're going to have a new constitution." During the meeting, the Argentine Ambassador echoed the November 30th Mercosur statement which declared support for the Bolivian institutional regime and rejected any "attempt to weaken the stability of the government and bodies elected by the people," a statement that Brazilian contacts told us "can be viewed as supporting the Bolivian government."

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Prefects (State Governors) in the United States
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¶3. (C) Meanwhile, Evo and the MAS are claiming that the visit of four opposition prefects to the United States to meet with the OAS and the United Nations is another example of the "empire's" support for the opposition; the government is also linking the opposition prefects with former president "Goni" Sanchez de Lozada and former U.S. Ambassador to Bolivia Manuel Rocha. (Comment: State news outlet ABI released a timeline of alleged Rocha activities when he was Ambassador to Bolivia and against Evo since retiring. End comment.) Minister of the Presidency Juan Ramon Quintana gave a press conference to denounce the actions of the prefects and suggest that the visit was coordinated by former career diplomat and Bolivian ambassador (under Goni) Jaime Aparicio. Quintana accused the prefects of having "strange" contacts with the former government minister and with Goni's son-in-law.

¶4. (C) A meeting of prefects called by Evo during the absence of the four opposition prefects was attended by only two MAS prefects (from Oruro and Potosi.) The meeting will be rescheduled: Evo publicly reminded the four traveling prefects that "the problems are here, in Bolivia, and not in the United States."

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Chiefs of Mission Meeting
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¶5. (C) In a separate meeting chaired by the Dean of the Diplomatic Corp, the Papal Nuncio, for chiefs of mission in La Paz, the Cuban ambassador successfully thwarted attempts to discuss the current political situation, arguing that the subject was inappropriate for the group and should instead be addressed bilaterally. The Cuban ambassador also criticized participants for wanting to update emergency preparedness measures, arguing that it would send the wrong message. The Cuban then noted that he himself has stocked up because, "if there is confrontation, it will be bad." Some participants took this statement to be more threat than warning.

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Lula and Bachelet Visits Postponed
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¶6. (C) The Brazilian Ambassador has confirmed to us that President Lula's visit to Bolivia has been postponed until December 16-17. December 16 will be a bilateral visit, while Chile's President Bachelet has apparently also rescheduled in order to participate on the 17th. Contacts in the Brazilian embassy are sticking to their talking points that the delay is for domestic Brazilian reasons.

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Comment
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¶7. (C) Evo has publicly invited international human rights organizations to observe the Bolivian investigation into the three recent deaths of protesters in Sucre, but continues to reject international mediation in the current crisis. While Evo pushes forward with his constitution, he seems intent on trying to convince the international community that it is the opposition who is to blame for any violence and that the United States is conspiring against him. In fact, in a paid radio spot airing December 5, the Bolivian government accused the "oligarchy, the prefects and opposition Media Luna civic groups of trying to block progress in the Constituent Assembly with the support of the American Embassy."

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